

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN GRATITUDE EXPRESSIONS WITHIN A SAUDI FACEBOOK
GROUP

A RESEARCH PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF ARTS

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MAY 2018

Acknowledgments

First and Foremost, praise is to Allah, the Almighty, on whom ultimately we depend for sustenance and guidance.

Second, I am grateful to my supervisor Dr. Riddle who has taught me more than I could ever give her credit for here. I am also grateful for her guidance, careful reading and valuable constructive comments throughout the research process.

Last but not least, my deepest gratitude goes to my beloved parents and also to my brothers and sisters for their endless love, prayers and encouragement.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This study explores the strategies used by Saudi males and females when expressing and responding to gratitude in Saudi Arabic within same and mixed-gender settings. The data for this study were collected from naturally occurring settings through an academic Facebook group. This virtual community of practice includes both males and females who either have pursued or are pursuing post-graduate studies. The group was established so that Saudi academics can gather and share their experiences and answer each other's questions. It has more than 7,000 members, who come from different parts of Saudi Arabia. The majority of group members teach at state universities and are of relatively similar socioeconomic levels, since they have the same occupation and their salaries are standardized by the government, with only small differences from one university to another. Two hundred tokens of thanking are considered according to four gender pairings, male to male, male to female, female to male and female to female.

The relation between language use and gender has been much explored in the field of sociolinguistics over the past forty years or so. Still, the ways female and male Saudis use language in different gender settings have not been fully explored and many unanswered questions remain. There are a few studies that discuss the relationship between gender and thanking in Saudi Arabia. Altalhi (2014) analyzes the ways Saudi females express gratitude in different situations, but doesn't address strategies used by Saudi males. Hariri (2016) examines thanking only in emails between students and staff in an academic context. To the best of my knowledge, there are no studies that examine how Saudi males and females express gratitude in a social media platform like Facebook. Therefore, this paper aims to bridge this gap by analyzing the masculine and feminine patterns of expressing gratitude in the Saudi culture within a virtual community of practice.

In section 2 below, the objectives of the study are discussed as well as the study's hypotheses. Also, this section provides geographical and social background information about the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Section 3 provides a literature review. Section 4 explains the methodology of the study. Finally, the anticipated results, the significance of the research, limitations of the study and suggestions for future research are discussed in section 5.

2. OBJECTIVES, HYPOTHESES, SIGNIFICANCE AND BACKGROUND

2.1 OBJECTIVES

The study examines gender differences in the way speech act of thanking in Saudi Arabic is expressed and responded to in computer mediated communication (CMC) by Saudi males and females.

The questions that I attempt to answer are:

1. Do males in Saudi Arabia use different strategies when thanking females or do they use the same strategies that they use with other males?
2. Do Saudi females use different strategies when thanking males or do they use the same strategies that they use with other females?
3. Do Saudi females use in overall more strategies than Saudi males?
4. Which strategies are used most by each and both genders?
5. Which response strategies are used most by Saudi males and females?

2.2 HYPOTHESES

Seven hypotheses are tested in this study:

1. Males will use more strategies with females compared to when addressing males.

This hypothesis is based on the claim by Al-Khawaldeh & Žegarac (2013), that males put more emphasis on the need to express gratitude to females than to males.

2. Females will use more strategies per thanking event when addressing both genders.

This hypothesis is motivated by the fact that women tend to be sensitive to being polite and use more politeness strategies (Gudonog & Jing 2005; Froh et al., 2009).

3. Strategies that show affection (e.g. using endearment terms) will be used less commonly than other strategies.

Affection strategies are not expected to be used commonly due to the fact that the majority of people in this group are not familiar each other and the social distance between them is high.

4. Bald thanking (i.e. default thanking) will be the most common strategy used.

This hypothesis is based on Altalhi's (2014) findings that bald thanking was the most frequently used strategy when thanking for a favor in Saudi Arabic by females.

5. Complimenting strategies will be used the least.

This result is expected due to the high social distance between the members.

6. The honorific 2nd plural strategy will not be used as frequently as bald thanking
7. The no response strategy to thanking will be the most common reply strategy.

This hypothesis is grounded in the fact that CMC poses a less pressing need for an immediate response compared to face-to-face communication.

2.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Thanking has a high social value in Saudi Arabia and its importance is emphasized by the teachings of prophet Muhammed, who said “He who does not thank people, does not thank Allah”. This makes thanking both socially and religiously important for Saudi Arabic speakers.

The ways Saudi males and females use language is an area that needs more research in particular. The Saudi Arabian society provides an interesting area to study the influence of gender on language due to its patterns of gender segregation, which may result in a greater difference in language use between the genders in Saudi Arabia compared to other Arabic speaking cultures, in which segregation between the two genders is less strict. There are only two studies that discuss the relationship between gender and thanking in Saudi Arabia. Altalhi (2014) analyzes the ways Saudi females express gratitude in three situations, but doesn’t address strategies used by Saudi males. Hariri (2016) examines thanking only in emails between students and staff in an academic context. To the best of my knowledge, there are no studies that examine how Saudi males and females express gratitude in social media platforms like Facebook. Therefore, this paper aims to bridge this gap by analyzing the masculine and feminine patterns of expressing gratitude in the Saudi culture within a virtual community of practice.

2.4 BACKGROUND: SAUDI ARABIA

2.4.1 GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND ON SAUDI ARABIA

Saudi Arabia is the largest country in the Arabian Peninsula, located in the western part of Asia. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was founded by King Abdul-Aziz bin Saud in 1932. Saudi Arabia shares borders with Jordan, Iraq, and Kuwait to the north, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, and Yemen to the East and the Red Sea to the west. It is divided into 13 regions, and each region has a capital city. Arabic is the native and official language of Saudi Arabia. There are many sub-dialects of Saudi Arabi, which differ according to region, tribe, Bedouin affiliation and urbanity.

Figure 1. The Location of Saudi Arabia.



2.4.2 OVERVIEW OF GENDER IN SAUDI ARABIA

In Saudi Arabia, the Islamic concepts of modesty and chastity are strictly observed. Therefore, men typically do not talk directly with women who are not their relatives, nor do they socialize

with them and vice versa (Zuhur 2011: 218). Men and women in Saudi Arabia undergo gendered-schooling at all levels – elementary, secondary, high school and university. Around the age of puberty, boys and girls are taught that they need to play with their same-sex peers. Men and women are not supposed to interact with each other if they are not family members. Therefore, talking to a stranger of the opposite sex is kept to a minimum and mostly avoided unless the interaction is necessary. Gender segregation is thus prominent in Saudi social life for and it is the cultural norm in domestic locations, such as family gatherings and weddings. It is also the law in public places, such as schools, banks, or on public transportation (AlMunajjed 1997: 33). Men are expected to gather solely with men in formal or informal social gatherings, while women are expected to gather in a separate place to guarantee their privacy (Zuhur 2011: 256, 257).

This segregation does not imply isolation for women; Saudi women are socially active and play important roles in society. However, to ensure their privacy in public life, women are required by religion, society and law to wear a veil outside their homes or in the presence of extended male family members (paternal or maternal) (AlMunajjed 1997: 53).

In terms of CMC, anonymity and the absence of face-to-face communication provide Saudi males and females with fewer social restrictions and more freedom to interact with members of the opposite sex.

3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The literature review consists of both theoretical and empirical studies that are relevant to the topic of this study. The first part discusses the different theories and frameworks that aim to

describe the politeness phenomena such as the work of Brown and Levinson. The second part addresses the speech act theory by Searle (1969). The third part look at different studies that examine the speech act of thanking and the last part focuses on studies on Arabic speech act of thanking.

3.2 SPEECH ACTS

Austin (1962) who introduced the concept that saying something can also involve doing something. For example, by saying “I am sorry”, a speaker is not only uttering a phrase in English but is also performing an act, that of apologizing. A number of different types of speech acts and responses to them that have been investigated in the literature, including apologies, requests, compliments, complaints, expressions of gratitude, refusals, and disagreements.

The work of language philosophers such as Austin (1962) and Searle (1975) has formed the foundation of our understanding of speech acts. Other important concepts and theories include communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1974), pragmatic competence (Leech, 1983; Thomas, 1983), theories of politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987), and to some extent, theories of culture and intercultural communication (Hofstede, 1980, 1991; Triandis, 1995). The empirical investigation of speech acts can provide a better understanding of how human communication is carried out. (Olshtain & Blum-Kulka, 1985).

Furthermore, research in speech acts can provide insights regarding the social and cultural norms that inform speech act realization in a given speech community (Meier, 1995, 1997; Richards & Schmidt, 1983). In addition, it can provide empirical data to evaluate the theories of politeness and intercultural communication. Lastly, speech act research is particularly important in the field

of foreign and second language teaching and learning. Findings from speech act studies can be valuable sources for foreign language teachers and developers of teaching materials (Bardovi-Harlig, 1996). According to Meier (1995) and Takahashi & Beebe (1993) teaching these pragmatic aspects of language can minimize intercultural communication breakdowns and help reduce cultural stereotyping.

3. 3 POLITENESS

Several theories have been proposed to provide a conceptual framework for understanding politeness. One of the earliest efforts was the work of Goffman (1967), who described politeness within the framework of a general theory of 31 behaviors. He also introduced the important concept of face, which was later added to Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1987). The concept of face will be explained in more detailed below. Lakoff (1975) also attempted to contribute to our understanding of politeness, which she defines in terms of the desire to reduce friction in social interaction. She suggested a set of rules for polite behavior and showed how politeness can be conveyed through syntactic and lexical strategies. In a similar way, Leech (1983) also proposed a number of maxims of politeness that can be compared to Grice's (1975) maxims of conversation. The works of Leech and Lakoff have been criticized on the grounds that such static rules can be infinite since the nature of interaction can vary greatly depending on the setting, the interlocutors and the purpose of the interaction (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Watts, 1992).

Brown and Levinson (1987) made a significant contribution to the study of politeness by proposing a theory of politeness that is not rule-based, but rather based on the idea that the goal of politeness is to reduce the imposition on the hearer and save the face of the speaker. Their concept of face is derived from Goffman (1967). It can be generally defined as a person's public

self-image and it can be maintained, enhanced or lost. People generally cooperate and expect other people's cooperation in maintaining face in interaction. Brown and Levinson distinguish between two types of face: positive face and negative face. A person's positive face refers to the person's desire to be liked and approved of by others; negative face, on the other hand, refers to his or her desire to be free from imposition.

Based on this concept of face, Brown and Levinson propose two types of politeness: negative and positive. Positive politeness attends to the hearer's positive face, which is achieved by conveying to the hearer that his or her desires and wants are similar to the speaker's desires and wants. The strategies Brown and Levinson suggest for achieving this type of politeness emphasize solidarity and rapport between speaker and hearer by expressing sympathy to the hearer and using terms that signify ingroup membership. Negative politeness, on the other hand, attends to the hearer's negative face by showing that the speaker does not intend to impede the hearer's freedom of action or invade his or her personal space.

Brown and Levinson (1987) suggest that some of the speech acts are by definition face-threatening. These face-threatening speech acts (FTA) can be categorized according to whether they threaten the speaker's face or the hearer's face, and whether they threaten the positive face or the negative face. For example, the speech act of requesting threatens the hearer's negative face since it shows that the speaker intends to impede on the hearer's freedom from imposition. The speech act of refusal threatens the hearer's positive face since it shows that the speaker does not care about the hearer's wants or desires and that there's a mismatch between the speaker's desires and the hearer's desires. Brown and Levinson also propose three variables or factors that affect the seriousness of an FTA. These are the relative power of speaker over hearer (e.g., an interaction between a manager and an employee vs. an interaction between two employees); the

social distance between hearer and speaker (e.g., an interaction between strangers vs. an interaction between friends); and the weight or level of the imposition (e.g., asking someone about the time vs. asking for a \$5,000 loan). It is important to mention that Brown and Levinson view these factors as universal.

According to Brown and Levinson, speakers have one of three options when performing FTA's. They can use a *Direct FTA* which means that they perform the speech act without mitigating its illocutionary force. This can be due, for example, to the relative authority and power of speaker over hearer. The second option is to use a *Mitigated FTA* by employing softening markers such as 'please' or hedges. The third option is to use an *Indirect FTA*, which minimizes the imposition on the hearer. This can be achieved by using hints or metaphors and expressing one's intention vaguely as a passive implication. See examples in 1:

1a. Direct FTA

'Give me the remote control'

b. Mitigated FTA

'Could you please pass me the remote control?'

c. Indirect FTA

'I want to change the channel, but I'm too tired to get the remote'

Although Brown and Levinson's theory has been very influential as a framework for the empirical investigation of speech acts, it has received a number of criticisms. For example, one of the criticisms is the theory's focus on the hearer's face as the most important factor in defining and identifying an FTA (Meier 1995). Brown and Levinson's claim that their framework is

universal has also been challenged by empirical research. Speech act studies in Polish (Wierzbicka, 1985), Japanese (Matsumoto, 1988), and Chinese (Gu, 34 1990) have shown that the concept of negative politeness might not be relevant in some cultures. In addition, Brown and Levinson's claims of a linear relationship between politeness and indirectness have also been shown to be empirically unsupported (Blum-Kulka, 1987; Wierzbicka, 1985, 1991; Wolfson, 1989). Despite these criticisms, Brown and Levinson's theory remains a very valuable analytical framework for understanding politeness within the framework of speech act research. In fact, the majority of cross-cultural speech act studies that have been conducted over the past 20 years have used this theory as a framework for understanding how speech acts are differentially realized in different cultures (Morkus, 2009).

3.3.1 STUDIES ON THE SPEECH ACT OF THANKING

Multiple studies have been conducted on the speech act of thanking. Some of these investigate the strategies used by speakers across languages, while others examine the speech acts of thanking according to their functions and forms. There have been also studies on the influence of "pragmatic transfer" on EFL/ESL learners' performance of the speech act of thanking.

According to many researchers, this speech act is a universal illocution (Coulmas, 1981; Aijmer, 1996; & Schneider, 2005). Jautz suggests that gratitude expressions are used "when a speaker wants the addressee to know that s/he is grateful for what the addressee has said or done" (2008, p. 142). Eisenstein and Bodman (1995) state that expressing gratitude can "engender feelings of warmth and solidarity among interlocutors" (1995 p. 64). Jung (1994) claims that gratitude expression has the "effect of enhancing rapport between the interlocutors" (1994 p. 20). He points out that some gratitude expressions can have multiple functions depending on the

situation, such as “conversational openings, stopping, leave taking and offering positive reinforcement”. (1994 p. 20).

3.3.2 STUDIES ON THE ARABIC SPEECH ACT OF THANKING

There are a number of studies that examine the ways gratitude is expressed in different Arabic cultures and countries mostly from Egypt, Jordan, Iraq and from Saudi Arabia. However, there is less focus on gender differences. In this section, these studies will be discussed with more focus on studies that examine gender differences in the speech act of thanking.

Morsi (2010) investigates the speech act of thanking in the Egyptian Arabic dialect. She states that Egyptian speakers employ different strategies in expressing and responding to gratitude expressions. She points out that Egyptian speakers use “repetition, redundancy and plenty of formulaic expressions [...] in order to show sincerity and gratitude to the hearer” (2010, p. 5).

Morsi collected 85 examples of naturally occurring thanking and responses to thanking in everyday interactions, in two neighborhoods of New York City, Bay Ridge, Brooklyn and Astoria, Queens. She divides the data into four categories according to the function of the thanking: appreciation of benefit, leave-taking, and opening and closing a conversation. In her data, 36 tokens serve as an appreciation of benefit. She found that one or more of the following strategies was used: repetition, formulaic expressions, explicit mention of thanks, (e.g. ‘thanks a million’, ‘don’t mention it’), blessings (e.g. ‘bless your hand’, ‘bless your heart’, ‘may God reward you’), or other non-religious forms including wishes, (e.g. ‘may we hear good things about you’) all of which result in a lengthy form and expressions of gratitude. The responses to thanking included acceptance of the thanking, denial of the favor, commenting on the thanking

with a compliment, and offering future help. The older participants (50 years and above) produced more lengthy forms when expressing gratitude than younger participants.

Al-Khawaldeh and Žegarac (2013) examined Jordanian and English native speakers' perceptions of the speech act of thanking. The main aim was to explore the similarities and the differences between Jordanian and English perceptions of expressing speech acts of thanking. The subjects were male and female native speakers of Arabic and English. They comprised 20 British and 20 Jordanian postgraduate students aged twenty-one to thirty-four studying at universities in Jordan and the United Kingdom. The data for this study were collected during semi-structured, audio-taped interviews.

The forty interviews revealed some similarities but also notable cross-cultural differences. Both native groups adhered to cultural norms and values in their use of thanking expressions. For example, the English participants stressed the idea that expressing gratitude is a being a conventional social norm and cultural value. They also stated that thanking is a matter of common decency and manners taught at home and school from an early age. The Jordanian participants said that thanking is a reflection of a good personal image, which helps in establishing and sustaining good social relationships. The religious background of Jordanian seems to have played a role in motivating their gratitude expressions. 16 out of 20 Jordanian participants stated that their deep commitment to thanking was related to some religious belief such as "Those who do not thank humans do not thank God" (2013, p. 233).

The data show that, "in both native groups, social familiarity and degree of imposition were found to be the most significant variables" (2013, p. 234). The study also shows that Jordanian and English participants emphasized the idea that the greater the favor received the more elaborate and extensive thanking should be. The authors point out that "this is due to the fact that

people feel more indebted for receiving favours which require more effort and time” (2013, p. 235).

The most important theoretical finding according to the researchers is that their data “do not support Brown and Levinson’s (1987) claim that thanking is a speech act which intrinsically threatens the speaker’s negative face because it involves overt acceptance of an imposition on the speaker” (Al-Khawaldeh & Žegarac, 2013). Rather, they believe that thanking should be viewed as a way of establishing and sustaining social relationships. This view conforms to the views by Searle (1969) and Leech (1983), who both stress positive aspects of the speech act of thanking and believe that it helps in maintaining a polite and a friendly social atmosphere. Their findings show as well that cultural variation in thanking is due to the high degree of sensitivity of this speech act to the complex interplay of a range of social and contextual variables.

Al-Shaer (2013) studied how both English and Arabic realize promising and thanking speech acts. Some English examples were collected from Tillitt and Bruder's book "*Speaking Naturally: Communication Skills in American English*" (1985) Other examples were taken from references which contain discussions of speech acts. The Arabic examples were collected from both Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and daily social interactions, as observed and heard by the researcher in his daily interactions with native speakers of Arabic in a Palestinian city, Bethlehem Governorate.

The study shows differences in the way speech act of thanking is realized by the two languages at the level of structures and lexical items used. The findings show that performative verbs are rarely used in informal or colloquial Arabic speech acts and that in all cases of thanking, the expressions show politeness, acknowledge the hearer’s help, favor or gift, and express deep indebtedness.

One of the few studies that covers the speech act of thanking in Saudi Arabia was conducted by Altalhi (2014). She found interesting differences in the way Hijazi females express and respond to gratitude depending on the type of benefit received. She collected and analyzed 400 naturally occurring thanking exchanges produced by female speakers of Hijazi Arabic within three situations: thanking for low imposition favors, for providing a meal and for receiving a gift.

She found that Hijazi females employ varied strategies when expressing or responding to thanking for a low imposition favor but used a more limited number of strategies when expressing or responding to thanking for a meal or a gift.

One of the strategies in Altalhi's study is *bald thanking*. The term *bald thanking* was coined by Rubin (1983) (as cited in Eisenstein & Bodman, 1986) who examined different uses of the phrase "thank you" in English in Hawaii. One of the common types of thanking she encountered was what she calls *bald* thank you, which is a quick and automatic thanking commonly used in typical service encounters. Hijazi females most frequently used the *bald thanking* strategy when expressing gratitude for a favor. This may be because some of the interlocutors were strangers. Altalhi suggests that *bald thanking* expressions are brief and suitable, and do not distract the interlocutors from continuing everyday activities. However, if the Hijazi interlocutors are relatives or friend, they would be more likely to use *explicit benediction* or a combination of thanking strategies to show sincerity.

In the data in Altalhi's study, Hijazi females did not use multiple thanking strategies when expressing gratitude for a meal. Rather they showed a preference for *expressing benediction* to verbalize their thanking. Directing prayers and blessings to the host is a key social aspect of Hijazi society. This usage is considered the politest way to show appreciation. In fact, using *bald thanking* like *shukran* 'thanks' or Stating the Favor in this context sounds odd.

The Hijazi females adopted the strategy of expressing the *non-necessity of the favor* when receiving a gift. After the donor's reply, they combined three strategies together (*bald thanking* + *explicit benediction* + *expressing repayment*), which Altalhi suggests expressed honest and profound gratitude. A similar effect may be achieved by using only *explicit benediction* or a combination of *implicit benediction* and *complimenting the thankee*.

Al-Khawaldeh and Žegarac (2013) examined gender influence in Jordanian culture on the expression of gratitude in some everyday situations. They found a considerable influence of gender on the performance and reception of the thanking act. Differences between females and males were found in both same-gender and mixed-gender interactions depending on the mandatoriness and the ways of communicating gratitude.

Khawaldeh & Žegarac found no clear-cut answer to the question of who thank more, males or females. However, it is noticeable that a number of factors affect the production and the reception of the linguistic expression of gratitude, including the status differences between the thanker and the thankee, the degree of familiarity between them and the weight of obligation on the thanker.

Hariri (2016) is the most recent work on the speech act of thanking in Saudi Arabic is by. Hariri examined the role of gender and social status on the strategies choices by Saudi males and females through 140 academic emails between professors and students in Arabic and English. Her work was driven by two research questions, (1) How do expressions of gratitude vary according to the gender and role of the email sender? (2) How the rapport potential of thanking is perceived by the participants in this study? She found that "gender appears to have some influence on the frequent use of expression of gratitude as women used thanking more than men and that expressing gratitude is conveyed differently among men and women" (2016, p. 71). She

also found that thanking increases in emails that were sent up the hierarchy compared to emails that were sent down.

4. METHODOLOGY

The hypotheses are:

1. Males will use more strategies with other females compared to when addressing males.
2. Females will use more strategies per thanking event when addressing both genders.
3. Strategies that show affection (e.g. using endearment terms)' will be used less commonly than other strategies
4. Bald thanking (i.e. default thanking) will be the most common strategy used.
5. Complimenting strategies will be used the least.
6. The honorific 2nd plural strategy will not be used as frequently as bald thanking.
7. The no response strategy to thanking will be the most common reply strategy.

4.1 DATA COLLECTION AND PARTICIPANTS

The data for this study were naturally occurring tokens examined on an academic Facebook group. This virtual community of practice includes both males and females who either have pursued or are pursuing post-graduate studies. The group was established so that Saudi academics can gather and share their experiences and answer each other's questions. It has more than 7000 thousand members who come from different parts of Saudi Arabia. The majority of the members work in state universities as faculty members and have a relatively similar socioeconomic level since they have the same occupation and their salaries are standardized by the government, with only small differences from one university to another.

The study examined the most recent 200 tokens of thanking at the time of the data collection.

The analysis takes into account the gender of the interlocutors. There are four categories depending on the gender of the interlocutors, male to male (M to M), male to female (M to F), female to male (F to M) and female to female (F to F). All the tokens are

Table 1. The distribution of thanking tokens

Token distribution			
Males Thanking		Females Thanking	
Males	Females	Males	Females
50	50	50	50
Total Thanking Tokens 200			

4.2 ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

4.2.1 DETERMINING GENDER, SOCIAL DISTANCE AND THE LEVEL OF IMPOSITION IN FACEBOOK

The gender of the interlocutors in Facebook can be determined from the post author's gender status information, name, handler or his/her profile picture. The values for the *level of imposition* variable are of low (i-) or high (i+) imposition. Most of the requests made in this group are information-seeking, which can be considered a low-imposition favor (i-). However, if the information requested required knowledge beyond the addressee's current resources and knowledge (e.g. if the addressee promises to ask someone else for more information), then the weight or level of imposition was calculated to (i+). The social distance (SD) was assigned (SD+) and (SD-) values. The unmarked situation in this Facebook group is that the majority of the interlocutors don't know each other (SD-). But if they showed in their exchanges that they knew each other or used terms of address that express intimacy (e.g. using *teknonyms*, i.e.

referring to parents by the name of their first-born child. *Teknonyms* are used mostly between socially close people in Saudi Arabic), then the SD was rated as (SD+).

4.2.2 THANKING CODING SCHEME

A number of gratitude expression coding schemes have been developed by researchers (e.g. Eisentein & Bodman, 1986,1993; Aijmer, 1996; Chang, 2005; Schauer & Adolph, 2006; Chang, 2008). The strategies in Schauer & Adolph's (2006) coding scheme can be divided into head acts and supportive moves. Their focus is on formulaic expressions of gratitude. Therefore the head acts in their coding scheme are focused on the stem "thank" and "cheers" and variations of thanking (e.g. thank you, thanks, thanks a lot, cheers). The supportive moves consist of six strategies: complimenting the interlocutor, stating the reason, confirming interlocutor's commitment, stating intent to reciprocate, stating interlocutor's non-existent obligation and refusing.

Eisenstein and Bodman (1986) do not explain their coding scheme completely, but they give some examples on how they coded their data. Their coding scheme includes a number of strategies which function as head acts (e.g. thanking, expressing appreciation) and others that function as supportive moves (complimenting the action/subject, expressing surprise, stating preference, expressing pleasure, stating a person's name, promising, etc.)

The thanking coding schemes discussed here vary in terms of the researchers' focus (e.g. Schauer and Adolph focus on formulaic expressions) and on how detailed the analysis is. Thus, some of the coding schemes listed here are more micro-level than others. For example, the number of strategies in Chang's scheme is triple the number used in Schauer and Adolph's

scheme. Nevertheless, all of the coding schemes serve the purpose of categorizing different gratitude utterances into a set of strategies.

The coding scheme used in this study was created by Al-Zubaidi (2012) for comparing American English and Iraqi Arabic. It is well adapted to Arabic in including *benediction* as a strategy, which captures the influence of religion on gratitude expressions. Al-Zubaidi makes a further distinction between *explicit benediction* and *implicit benediction*. *Explicit benediction* refers to cases where the word Allah ‘God’ appears in the expression, while in *implicit benediction* it doesn’t appear overtly in the blessings or the wishes, but is understood. Both the Saudi and Jordanian cultures can be considered fairly religious cultures in which invoking God is a frequent pattern in everyday conversations (e.g. *inshallah* ‘God willing’ is a ubiquitous phrase used by most Arabs, and especially Muslims). Al-Zubaidi isolated nine strategies for expressing gratitude.

Table 3. *Strategies of Gratitude Expression* (Al-Zubaidi 2012, p. 102)

<i>Strategies of Gratitude Expression</i>	<i>Sub-strategies</i>
1. <i>Thanking</i>	<i>a. Bald Thanking</i> <i>b. Thanking and stating the favor</i> <i>c. Thanking and stating the imposition</i>
2. <i>Complimenting</i>	<i>a. Complimenting the thankee</i> <i>b. Complimenting the thanking act</i>
3. <i>Expressing benediction</i>	<i>a. Explicit Benediction</i> <i>b. Implicit benediction</i>
4. <i>Apologizing</i>	<i>a. Expressing apology</i> <i>b. Expressing embarrassment</i> <i>c. Expressing self-denigration</i>
5. <i>Acknowledging the imposition</i>	<i>a. Recognizing the imposition</i> <i>b. Expressing the unnecessary of the favor</i>
6. <i>Reciprocating</i>	<i>a. Expressing indebtedness</i> <i>b. Expressing repayment</i>
<i>Expressing intimacy</i>	<i>a. Body part term.</i> <i>b. Endearment term</i> <i>c. Kinship term</i>
8. <i>Alerting</i>	<i>a. Attention getter</i> <i>b. Address term</i>
9. <i>Other</i>	<i>a. Swearing</i> <i>b. Here statement</i> <i>c. Opting-out</i> <i>d. Non-verbal communication</i> <i>e. Refusal</i> <i>f. Stating results</i> <i>g. Expressing liking</i>

Still, most of the above coding schemes were originally created to capture mostly spoken thanking acts, and therefore, they needed to be modified to be compatible with the written data in this study. The modifications include adding the *post-like*, *emoticon* and *honorific 2nd person plural* strategies. Also, addressing terms were expanded into *name*, *name & title*, and *title*. Each strategy will be discussed in more detail below. The following is the modified version of Al-Zubaidi's gratitude coding scheme:

Table 4. Gratitude expression coding scheme

Thanking strategies	
1. Thanking	a. Bald thanking
	b. Using emoticons
	c. Thanking and stating the favor
	d. Post-like
2. Complimenting	a. Complimenting the thankee
	b. Complimenting the thanking act
3. Expressing benediction	a. Explicit benediction
	b. Implicit benediction
4. Expressing intimacy	a. Body part term
	b. Endearment term
5. Address term	a. Name
	b. Title
	c. Name and title
	c. Kinship term
	d. Honorific 2 nd pl.

4.2.3 RESPONSES TO THANKING



Similarly to thanking, there are several coding schemes for responses to thanking. Despite some differences, the goal of all of these is to categorize the responses into a set of strategies. The following table presents several coding schemes used in studies that examine the speech act of thanking.

Table 5. Coding Schemes in Previous Studies on the Strategies Used to Respond to Gratitude Expressions (Al-Zubaidi 2012, p. 80)

Coulmas (1981)	Jung (1994)	Aijmer (1996)	Schneider (2005)	Dumitrescu (2006)
1. Recognizing the object of gratitude and indicating whatever has been done was gladly done.	1. Acceptance.	1. Minimizing the favor.	1. Minimizing the favor.	1. Minimizing the favor.
2. Denying the existence of the object of gratitude or playing it down.	2. Denial.	2. Expressing pleasure.	2. Expressing pleasure.	2. Acceptance.
	3. Reciprocating.	3. Expressing appreciation of the addressee.	3. Expressing appreciation.	
	4. Non-verbal gesture.		4. Returning thanks.	
	5. Comment		5. Acknowledging thanks.	
	6. Non-response			

The response coding scheme that I use here is a modified version of Jung (1994). Like for thanking, this thanking response coding scheme had to be modified since this, like most others, was originally designed to capture gratitude strategies in speaking and not in writing. In CMC, the need to respond to thanking is less pressing than in face-to-face interaction, Thus, the *non-response* strategy in Jung coding system is useful to categorize this choice in Saudi Arabic. The revised coding scheme used here consists of three major strategies: *acceptance*, *denial* and *no response*. The acceptance category is divided into three sub-strategies: *text*, *emoticon* and *post-like*. The modified version renames *the non-verbal gesture* strategy to *emoticon*, which functions in a similar manner to the non-verbal gesture in CMC (Lo, 2008). The following table explains and provide example for each strategy.

Table 6. Response to gratitude coding scheme:

Strategy	Acceptance			Denial	No response
Sub-strategy	Text	Emoticon	Post-like		
Description	Responding with a text.	Using emoticon	Pressing a post's like button	Minimizing the favor	No response to gratitude expression
Example	e.g. <i>you are welcome</i>			e.g. <i>it's nothing</i>	-

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 GRATITUDE EXPRESSION

The strategies for communicating gratitude linguistically are identified in terms of type and frequency and then described and analyzed strategy by strategy. The analysis of the differences in the ways Saudi females and males express gratitude linguistically in the data take into account same-gender and mixed-gender settings. The findings for each strategy are presented in terms of frequencies with respect to the gender of the interlocutors (M to M, M to F, F to M and F to F). This is followed by a description of the data aimed at highlighting the most striking patterns of the relationship between strategy, the gender of the thanker, the gender of the thankee. Table 7 provides the types of thanking exchanges and shows the frequency of each. The findings and results of each strategy will be discussed one by one.

One of the main findings is that Saudi males employed more strategies per thanking than females which goes against the third hypothesis. For each thanking act, Saudi males used 1.5 strategies whereas Saudi females used 1.28 strategies.

Table 7. Summary of the strategies' usage by Saudi males and females

Gratitude expressions statistics Thanking strategy		M to M	M to F	F to M	F to F	N	%	Total	
								N	%
1. Thanking	a. Bald Thanking	14	13	11	10	48	17.26%	204	73.38%
	b. Thanking and stating the favor	1	3	3	5	12	4.31%		
	c. Using emoticon	4	5	2	2	13	4.67%		
	d. Post-like	29	33	35	34	131	47.12%		
2. Complimenting	a. Complimenting the thankee	0	0	0	0	0	0%	2	0.71%
	b. Complimenting the thanking act	2	0	0	0	2	0.71%		
3. Expressing benediction	a. Explicit Benediction	12	9	11	9	41	14.74%	56	20.14%
	b. Implicit benediction	6	4	1	4	15	5.39%		
4. Expressing intimacy	a. Body part term.	0	0	0	0	0	0%	4	1.43%
	b. Endearment term	4	0	0	0	4	1.43%		
5. Address terms	a. Name	5	1	0	0	6	2.15%	12	4.31%
	b. Title	0	0	0	0	0	0%		
	c. Name and Title	0	0	0	0	0	0%		
	d. Kinship term	3	1	1	0	5	1.79%		
	e. Honorific 2 nd pl.	0	1	0	0	1	0.35%		
Total		80	70	64	64	278	100%	278	100%

5.1.1 THANKING

The *Thanking* strategy covers utterances made up of gratitude words such as ‘thank you’ or ‘thanks’ (Al-Zubaidi 2012, p.106). Examples of thanking words in Saudi Arabic are *shukran* ‘thanks’ or *mashkur* ‘thanks’ (the latter is less formal). This strategy is easily recognizable due to

the presence of the root *shkr* ‘related to thanking’ in the gratitude expression (Aijmer 1996, p.38). It also covers strategies that exist only in CMC including, the use of *emoticons* and the *post-liking* strategy.

Figure 2. Distribution of *Thanking* Strategies’ Usage

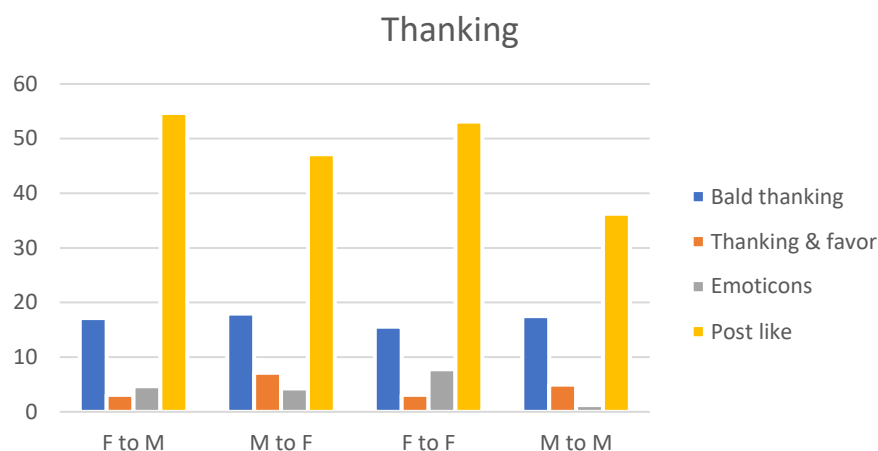


Figure 2 shows the variation in thanking strategy across the four gender interactions. From the figure we can see that the most used strategy in all interactions is the use of *post-like* strategy. In Facebook, users are provided with a function that enables them to click on a “like button” next to a post or a post reply. Across all the data, this strategy represents almost half of the strategies used when expressing gratitude (47.12%). No patterns were found related to the level of imposition or other social variables that seem to motivate the choice of this strategy; it is possible that the convenience associated with this strategy could be a factor in its high frequency. It was used as a single strategy in nearly two thirds of the cases (64.88%), and was combined with other strategies in the remaining one third (35.11%). *Post-like* strategy is usually combined with *bald thanking*, followed by *explicit benediction*. Females used this strategy slightly more than males in same and mixed gender settings, whether as a main strategy or combined with other strategies.

The second most frequent strategy by both males and females across all thanking exchanges is *bald thanking* (17.26%). Examples from the data include:

2a. *shukran axi Hasan* (M to M)

thank brother Hasan

‘Thank you, brother Hasan’.

b. *mashkuur ya axoi* (F to M)

thanks VOCATIVE (VOC) brother

‘Thanks, brother’.

Bald thanking is used almost equally in all gender interactions (15.6% in F to F, 17.18% in F to M, 18.57% in M to F and 17.5% in M to M). The high frequency of this strategy (along with explicit benediction strategy, discussed below) is likely due to the fact that it is a routinized expression in Saudi Arabic and used quite often when expressing gratitude in speech. Also, *bald thanking* was frequently combined with other strategies. For example, with the *post-like* strategy, *bald thanking* occurred 19 times, whereas with the *emoticon* strategy, for instance, it occurred only 4 times.

The third most common strategy within the category of thanking is *thanking and stating the favor* (4.67%). In this strategy, the thanker specifies the kind of favor received in the gratitude expression which usually include the preposition *'la* ‘for’. According to Jautz (2008, p. 142), by indicating the reason for thanking in the gratitude expression, the thanking act becomes more reasonable. This could occur in cases where the thanker might think that the hearer is not aware of the reason for thanking or what exactly they are being thanked for. In this strategy, Saudi

males showed more preference for this strategy than Saudi females, and they used it mostly within mixed-gender settings (7.14%). On the other hand, females had nearly similar usage rates within same and mixed-gender settings (3.6%).

The *emoticon* strategy is a major strategy in CMC and one of its exclusive features. As Komrsková states (2015, p. 1329) “CMC is often discussed as a new way of communication between written and spoken modes”. Besides combining features from both traditional modes, CMC also incorporates new innovations like emoticons, different uses of punctuation marks, and repetition of letters. Emoticons are ubiquitous in the Internet and have become naturalized in many different cultures. In the field of linguistics, emoticons are still primarily viewed as emotional markers (Baron, 2004; Tossell et al., 2012), but they also “provide information about how an utterance is supposed to be interpreted” (Skovholt et al., 2014, p. 780).

Surprisingly, emoticons are not used as much as would be expected within this Facebook group, accounting only for 4.31% of all strategies used in this study (e.g. compare with *post-like*, which was used 47.12% of the times). The high social distance between the members of this group could be one reason for this low frequency, since the use of emoticons indicates in many cases low social distance and even intimacy. Derks et al. (2007) suggest that one of the functions of nonverbal behavior in face to face communication is to express intimacy, which is partially compensated by emoticons in CMC.

“Nonverbal behavior in face-to-face communication may serve different functions. Three basic functions are: (a) providing information; (b) regulating interaction; and (c) *expressing intimacy* (e.g., Ekman & Friesen, 1969; Harrison, 1973). We assume that emoticons can, at least partially, serve the same functions in CMC.” (p. 843)

As shown in Figure 2, the Saudi females employed more emoticons in their gratitude expressions than Saudi males; women have been found in other studies as well to use emoticons more than men (Tossell et al., 2012). Females used this strategy the most with other females (7.8%) while males seem to disfavor the use of emoticons with other males (1.25%). Males used the following emoticons (🙏, 💔, 😂, 🌹 and 👍) while females used (😊, 🌸, 🙏, 🌹 and 🌺). Females employed emoticons exclusively to express gratitude whereas males used emoticons for thanking as well as other communicative functions (e.g. laughing 😂, sadness 💔). However, it is difficult to draw conclusions on the gender differences in emoticons uses due to their low occurrence rate in this study. See the examples in 3:

3a. *tamaam wa shukran 'al 'ifada* 🌺

ok and thanks for the benefit (F to M)

‘Ok and thanks for the information’.

b. *shukran bashaik 'la mauq'hum* 🌸

thanks I-check on site-their (F to F)

‘Thanks, I will check their website’.

c. *ya 'Tik 'lf 'afia abo Abdullah* 🙏

give-you thousands health father Abdullah (M to M)

‘May God bless you with wellness, Abo Abdullah’.

d. *mshkuur-iin inHalat* 🙏 *al mushkila wa 'araf-na maGzahum*

thanks-you(Pl) solved the problem and realized- we point-their (M to F)

‘Thanks, the problem was solved and I realized their point’.

5.1.2 COMPLIMENTING

Compliments are speech acts which can be employed to attribute credit explicitly or implicitly to the addressee for having or showing good characteristics, skills, etc. which are valued by the addresser (Al-Zubaidi, 2012). They are positive politeness devices which can engender goodwill and solidarity between the interlocutors (Holmes, 1995). As a strategy within thanking exchanges, compliments may be used as a single strategy or can be combined with other strategies. Aijmer (1996) suggests that although this strategy does not explicitly express gratitude, it can do so implicitly, in that when compliments are used by the thanker, they serve as cues that the thanker views the favor received positively. This gratefulness is manifested in the form of favorable evaluations towards that thankee or the object of thanking.

The *Complimenting* strategy is divided into sub-strategies, *complimenting the thankee*, in which compliments are attributed to the thankee (e.g. you are so thoughtful), and *complimenting the thanking act*, where the compliment is attributed to the favor or gift received (e.g. what a nice gift).

The whole category of complimenting is the least used strategy across all the data with a frequency of only 0.71%. It is possible that the low imposition level of favor asked and the lack of intimacy and the social power differences between the interlocutors resulted in the less frequent use of this strategy. The study by Al-Khawaldeh and Žegarac (2013) shows that Jordanian and English participants emphasize the idea that the greater the favor received, the more elaborate and extensive thanking should be stating that “this is due to the fact that people feel more indebted for receiving favours which require more effort and time” (p. 235).

This strategy was used twice and only in the same-gender setting by Saudi males (2.5%, frequency of compliments in M to M thanking exchanges). The attribute of the compliments was directed towards the thanking object instead of complimenting the thankee.

4a. *nuqTa muhimma shukran*

point important thanks

‘Good point, thanks’.

b. *sharH wafi baiZ allah wajhak ma gaSart allah yas’dik*

explanation complete whiten God face-your no shortage God make-happy-you

‘Great explanation, God bless you, you have done it perfectly, may God bless you with happiness’.

5.1.3 BENEDICTION

In this strategy, the thanker uses blessings and prayers to express thanking. *Benediction* is generally used to indicate that the thanker invokes God’s support and help for the thankee. In Muslim cultures, people greatly appreciate blessings and prayers. At the same time, they are considered to show the extent to which people are sincere in their thanking. Jaradat (2014, p. 67) states that “Allah expressions have permeated all aspects of a Muslim’s life, and that they have been spread to be used by Arabic speakers of all creeds”.

There are two sub-strategies of *benediction expressions* and both can function as main strategies: *explicit* and *implicit benediction*. In the first sub-strategy, the word *Allah* ‘God’ appears in the expression, while in the second type, the word *Allah* doesn’t appear in the blessings or the wishes, but is understood by both the hearer and the speaker. An example of *explicit benediction*

in Arabic is *Allh ya'tik al'afiya* 'God give you wellness'. The implicit form of the same expression would lack the direct reference to God, e.g., *ya'tik al'afiya* (with the same meaning).

The *benediction expression* category is the second most frequent category after *thanking*, representing 20.14% of all strategies across all thanking exchanges in this study. Using benediction to express gratitude is not very common in many western cultures. For example, in the study by Al-Zubaidi (2012) on Iraqi Arabic and American English, there were 282 instances of God invocation by Iraqi speaker versus zero instances by speakers of American English. This shows the far-reaching influence of the Islamic culture on the Arabic language (Farghal & Borini. 1997). Ferguson (1997, p. 209), also, states that wishes invoking God and blessings occur frequently in the speech of Arabic speakers, and they represent one of the most distinctive types of politeness formulas.

Figure 3. Distribution of *Benediction Strategies*' Use

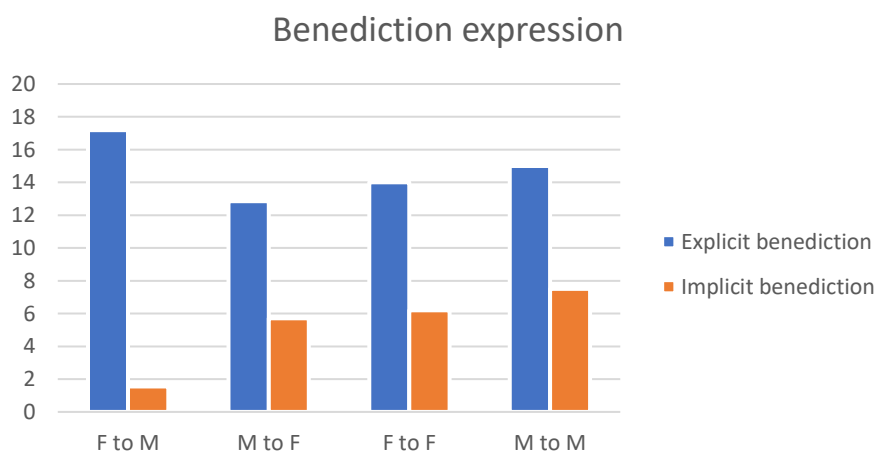


Figure 3 shows that both males and females express benediction more explicitly than implicitly (14.74% explicit vs. 5.39% implicit). This Facebook group is characterized by formality. Most of the topics discussed pertain to education and studying abroad, with very little humor involved.

This formality influences the type of utterance and strategies acceptable in this community of practice. *Explicit benediction* is associated more with a formal register than is *implicit benediction*. Heylighen & Dewaele (1999) states that “formal style is characterized by detachment, accuracy, rigidity and heaviness; an informal style is more flexible, direct, implicit, and involved...”. Thus, *explicit benediction* is more consistent with the predominantly formal atmosphere of this community of practice. In addition, the level of formality appears to be higher within mixed gender settings, where both males and females used implicit benediction the least. For example, the percentage of females employing this strategy with males *explicitly* is 17.18%, while the rate for *implicit* usage is only 1.56%.

5.1.4 EXPRESSING INTIMACY

When conveying thanking, the thanker sometimes may use certain terms to express “solidarity” or “harmony”, in order to “reduce the social distance” with the thankee (Al-Zubaidi, 2012 p. 131). The use of intimacy expressions can show that the thanker is attempting to reduce the social distance and increase solidarity with the thankee. This strategy does not stand by itself as a main gratitude expression strategy, but is combined with strategies from the categories of *thanking* or *benediction*. The category is divided into *body part terms* and *endearment terms*.

Examples of such terms are:

5.a *shukran ya galbi* (Body part)

thanks VOC heart

‘thanks sweetheart’.

b. *ya'tik al'afiya ya hubbi* (Endearment)

give-you the-wellness VOC love-my

'Thanks my love'.

Expressing intimacy strategies represent 1.43% of all strategies used in this study. These types of strategies are mostly used when the social distance between the interlocutors is low. Therefore, the lack of social closeness between the members of this group could be a reason for the low frequency of this strategy. Expressing intimacy was used solely by males in this study with other males accounting for 5% of the strategies used in M to M interaction. Since this strategy cannot stand alone as a main strategy by itself, it was combined with strategies such as *post-like*, *bald thanking*, *implicit benediction* and *thanking and stating the favor*. See example 6:

6.a *ya'Tik al'afia 'aziizi*

give-you wellness dear-my

'May God give you wellness, my dear'

b. *mashkuur ya Gali*

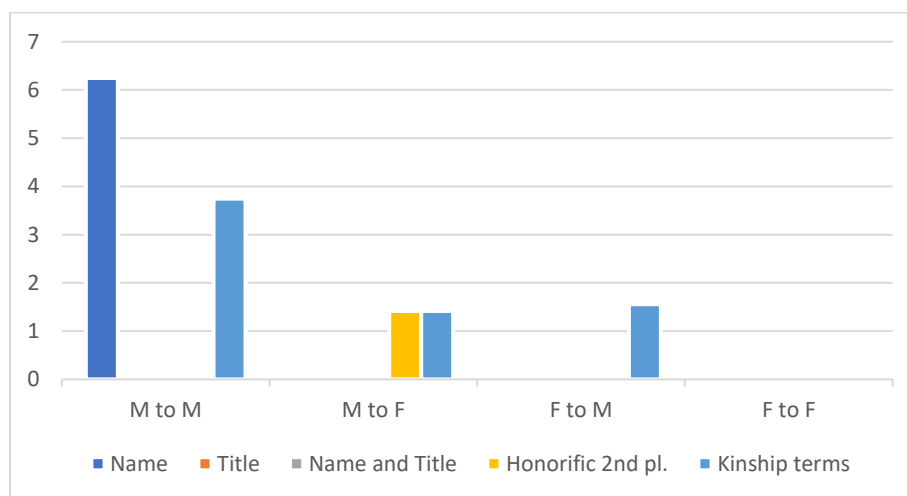
thanks VOC precious

'Thanks, precious'

The endearment term '*aziizi*' 'dear' in (a) is used mostly in formal contexts where the social distance between the interlocutors is high. *Gali* 'precious', on the other hand, is less associated with formal register than *aziizi* and can occur between socially close people when expressing intimacy. The *expressing intimacy* strategies shown above also function as address terms.

5.1.5 ADDRESS TERMS

Terms of address are words used in an utterance to refer to the addressee. In many instances, they serve as extremely important conveyors of social information (Parkinson 1985: 1). Address terms typically open a communicative act, determine the tone for the interchanges that follow and establish the relative power and distance between the interlocutors (Wood & Kroger 1991: 145). Al-Zubaidi characterizes *Address terms* as a sub-strategy which is used to grab the hearer's attention (Al-Zubaidi, 2012). However, here I employ this sub-strategy as a major strategy to categorize address terms not used to express intimacy. This major strategy is divided here into five strategies consisting of *name*, *title*, *name & title*, *kinship term* and *honorific 2nd p. pl.* Like *complimenting* and *expressing intimacy*, the *address terms* category is not used frequently across all the data, representing only 4.31% of the total number of strategies used. The choice of whether to address people with their *names*, *titles* or *names & titles* is significant, since addressing people with their names without their titles typically indicates a close social distance between the interlocutors; on the other hand, addressing people with their titles often indicates a wide social distance (Brown and Ford 1961). The findings of Al-Khawaldeh and Žegarac (2013) show that one of the functions of the *address term* strategy in their data is to signify difference in more formal and mixed-gender settings (e.g. “my sister”, p. 281)

Figure 4. Distribution of *Address Terms* Strategies' Use

The *name* strategy was used only by males when thanking other males (6.25%). Neither males nor females used titles or combined titles & names when addressing each other in this study.

Examples of *address term* strategy are:

7a. *ya'Tiik al'afia Abdulrahman*

give-you wellness Abdulrahman

'May God give you wellness Abdulrahman'

b. *shukran Khalid. aHtaj jami'a aw madina fiha altaxSaSain*

thanks Khalid I-need university or city has the-major-two

'Thanks Khalid. I need a university or a city that has the two majors'

One interpretation of the lack of title use in this group comes from the seminal work *Address in American English* by Brown and Ford (1961). They noticed that the most common forms of address in American English are the use of either the first name (FN) or the title with the last name (TLN). Brown and Ford concluded that status (power) of and intimacy (solidarity) between the interlocutors are the main factors governing the choice of address term. In this study, no

member has more authority than another member. Thus, there's no need to show difference through titles. A preferred strategy was to avoid using address terms altogether which occurred 94.5% of the time.

As mentioned earlier, I added to Al-Zubaidi's coding system the *Honorific 2nd person plural* strategy found in my data, as in:

8a. *Na-shukr jhuud-km*

1st pl.-thank effort-2PL

'We thank you for your efforts'.

b. *Allh ybaark fiikm doctor Fahad*

God bless you-2PL doctor Fahad

'God bless you Dr. Fahad'.

The use of the 2nd person plural pronoun with a singular addressee corresponds to the V, social distance, form of address while using the 2nd person singular with a singular addressee corresponds to the T or solidarity form (Brown & Gilman, 1960). This strategy was used only once in all thanking exchanges (0.35%), by a male to a female. This strategy is used mostly in Saudi Arabic when there is a social distance and asymmetry in the power distribution between the interlocutors.

Kinship terms are normally terms for blood relations. However, a kinship term in Arabic can also be used to address a stranger. In this case it is considered a fictive use of a kinship term, or according to Agha (2007), a metaphoric usage of a kinship term. Farghal and Shakir (1994: 242) examined the Jordanian Arabic usage of kin terms and concluded that they can be used with strangers as "distant honorifics" and relatives as "affectionate honorifics". The function in the former usage is to show solidarity (e.g. in contexts like summons, greetings, or requests), while

the function in the latter is to express intimacy. Thus, the use of kinship terms in the study falls within the “distant honorifics” category used between strangers. The total use of this strategy is 1.79%, with five instances: three between males, one by a male to a female and one by a female to a male. Examples of this include:

9a. *ya 'Tiik al'afia axuui Suliman*

give-you wellness brother Suliman (M to M)

‘May God give you wellness brother Suliman’

b. *mashkuur ya xuui*

thanks VOC brother (F to M)

‘Thanks brother’

c. *'lf shukur ya uxti*

thousand thanks VOC sister (M to F)

‘Thanks a lot sister’

In the second part of this section, I will examine the strategies used by Saudi males and females when responding to gratitude expressions.

5.2 RESPONSE TO GRATITUDE EXPRESSION

According to Leech, thanks have a “convivial function” which makes them “intrinsically courteous” (1983, p.104). When the hearer (H) benefits from the courteous nature of the expression of thanking, it causes him/her to be indebted to the speaker (S), leading the H to respond to the thanking to restore the balance. How this balance is restored is negotiated among the speakers (Brown and Levinson, 1978).

The response coding scheme used here is a modified version of Jung's (1994) scheme. It needed to be modified since it was originally designed to capture gratitude strategies in spoken language. The revised coding scheme consists of three major categories: *acceptance*, *denial* and *no response*. The acceptance category is divided into three sub-strategies: *text*, *emoticon* and *post-like* (see Table 6 above). Table 8 shows the frequency of response strategies in all gender interactions.

Table 8. The frequency of response strategies across all the data

Gratitude response statistics Response strategy		M to M	M to F	F to M	F to F	N	%	Total	
								N	%
1. Acceptance	a. Text	5	1	1	5	12	5.91%	28	13.79%
	b. Emoticon	0	1	0	1	2	0.98%		
	c. Post like	4	4	1	5	14	6.89%		
2. Denial		0	0	0	0	0	0%	0	0%
3. No response		42	45	48	40	172	84.72%	172	84.72%
Total		51	51	50	51	203	100%	203	100%

Acceptance category is the second most frequent category in the thanking responses (13.79%).

The *text* strategy, in which people respond in writing to gratitude expressions, was used in 5.91% of the interactions. It increases in same-gender settings and decreases in mixed-gender settings.

This strategy relies in some cases on the use of adjacency pairs in which there are formulaic responses for thanking (Schneider, 2005, p.101). Examples from the data include:

Thanking	Response to thanking	
10 a. <i>shukran</i>	<i>'afwan w balxidma</i>	
thanks	welcome and at service	M to F
'Thanks'	'You're welcome and at your service'	
b. <i>ya 'Tiik al 'afia ya rab</i>	<i>allah y'afiik</i>	
give-you the wellness VOC God	God give-wellness-you	F to F
'May God give you wellness'	'May God give you wellness too'	
c. <i>mashkuur</i>	<i>al'afu</i>	
thanks	welcome	M to M
'Thanks'	'You're welcome'	

Emoticons were used in only 0.98% of all responses to gratitude expressions. As noted earlier, emoticons are not used much in this Facebook group, either in thanking or in thanking responses. Despite the high frequency of the *post-like* strategy in gratitude expressions, it was used only in 6.89% of the responses.

The term *Denial strategy* is used in this study for the responses which minimize the significance of the favor. This strategy has been discussed in the literature under different labels, such as 'denial' (Jung, 1994), 'minimizing the favor' (Aijmer 1996; Schneider 2005; Dumitrescu 2006) and 'denying the existence of the object of gratitude or playing it down' (Coulmas, 1981). These are similar expressions that revolve around the strategy of *denial* in English, including *it wasn't a big deal, forget it, it's the least I could do, no worries*, etc. The *denial* strategy was never used

by the members of this Facebook group. The social variables and the level of imposition are two factors that would influence the choice of this strategy. The members of this group preferred either to accept the thanking or not respond to it, since most of the favors in this study are of low imposition,

The *no response* strategy is the most frequently used strategy in this study. However, it's rather difficult to decide whether this a deliberate strategy. Since Facebook is an asynchronous type of CMC (similar to email, discussion forum and webpages), the need for an instant response is less pressing than in synchronous CMC (e.g. chat and instant messaging applications).

Bays (1998) examined the chronemic characteristics of Internet Relay Chat, concluding that in synchronous CMC mode, "participants need to respond promptly in order that their contributions retain conversational relevance. Long pauses and lengthy responses also cause general delays which are unacceptable". Because of the fact that Facebook is not synchronous, there is no need for a prompt response. As a result, we cannot be certain whether people intentionally chose not to respond to thanking or simply never returned to the same post again to respond. However, this doesn't change the fact that not responding (84.78%) was the most frequent phenomenon in thanking responses.

6. CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

6.1 CONCLUSIONS

This study analyzed 200 gratitude expressions by Saudi males and females in Facebook to examine the role of gender on the strategies' choices. The results showed variation in the number and type of strategy between Saudi males and females.

Although it was hypothesized that Saudi females would employ more strategies per thanking event than Saudi males, the data in this study showed the opposite. Saudi males used 15% more strategies per thanking event than the Saudi females.

CMC provides an unprecedented means and new tools for communication and the way thanking is expressed in CMC is somewhat different from how it is communicated in face-to-face interaction since. In the case of thanking, the study showed that the participants made use of the new options available to them, which include emoticons and the post-like function in Facebook. The participants in this study were not reluctant to use what the new technology has to offer. In fact, the most frequent strategy in this study was the *post-like* strategy, which is an exclusive feature of CMC generally. On the other hand, the *emoticon* strategy was surprisingly not used as much by the participants in this group, which may be due to the lack of intimacy between the interlocutors and the general formal tone of the group. The innovative use of both strategies suggests that the quality and quantity of gratitude expression is not constant, rather it changes depending on the medium (e.g. post-like and emoticon strategies).

As hypothesized, *complimenting* was shown to be the least used strategies in this study. It was suggested that the low imposition level of the favors asked and the lack of intimacy and social power differences between the interlocutors could be factors for the low frequency of this strategy.

The category of benediction was found to be the second most frequently used category after thanking. The frequent use of this category along with its use as a single strategy show the deep influence of the Islamic religion on Saudi Arabic thanking.

Expressing intimacy strategies were the second to last in terms of frequency, which is not surprising, since these types of strategies indicate lack of social distance between the interlocutors.

The data in this study showed a lack of the *title* strategy use and a low rate of use for the *honorific 2nd pl.* strategy. This was mostly caused by the fact that the members in the Facebook group have equal social power. The most frequently used strategy in the address term category is addressing members with their names, although in the majority of cases, Saudi males and females chose not to use an address term altogether.

The second part of the results and discussion section examined the response to thanking strategies. In the category of *acceptance*, the most used strategy was the *post-like* strategy, followed by the strategies *text* and *emoticon*. None of the subjects attempted to play down or deny the need for gratitude expression, perhaps because all of the requests were of low imposition, as well as due to the lack of close social distance between the interlocutors. *No response* was found to be the most common thanking response.

6.2 LIMITATIONS

This study covers only one aspect of the Saudi speech community and doesn't include different Facebook groups which could represent other speech communities. The study focuses only on Saudi males and females who are older than 23 years old and doesn't include the younger population. All of the requests made by the subjects are information-seeking and there is no variation in terms of the level of imposition.

6.3 FUTURE RESEARCH

The way gratitude is expressed and responded to in Saudi culture is a research area that needs more study. The literature lacks studies that compare how gratitude is expressed by Saudi males and females in face-to-face communication. Future research can focus, for example, on the role of age, the influence of social status and power, and the effect of social distance between the interlocutors on the choices of thanking strategies in the Saudi speech community.

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8. APPENDIX

1. Transliteration system

Characters			IPA
Arabic	Transliteration	Example	Symbol
ء	a	أسماء	ʔ
ب	b	بريد	b
ت	t	تنافس	t
ث	TH	ثلاثة	θ
ج	j	جميل	dʒ
ح	H	حاد	ħ
خ	x	خوذة	x
د	d	دليل	d
ذ	th	ذهب	ð
ر	r	رفيع	r
ز	z	زينة	z
س	s	سماء	s
ش	sh	شريف	ʃ
ص	S	صوت	s ^ʕ
ض	D	ضريير	d ^ʕ
ط	T	طويل	t ^ʕ
ظ	Z	ظلم	ð ^ʕ
ع	'	عمل	ʕ
غ	G	غريب	ɣ
ف	f	فيلم	f
ق	q	قادر	q

Contin.			
Characters			IPA
Arabic	Transliteration	Example	Symbol
ك	k	كريم	k
ل	l	لذيق	l & t
م	m	مدير	m
ن	n	نور	n
ه	h	هول	h
و	w	وصل	w
ي	y	ياسر	j
Vowels			
َ	a	كُتِبَ	a
ُ	u	كُتِبَ	u
ِ	i	كِتَاب	i